



Churches Update

Issue 27, Conference edition

LABOUR BACKS ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY

Shadow Chancellor endorses Archbishop Welby's "bold vision for a different society"

Labour's Shadow Chancellor, John McDonnell, has welcomed a speech made by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, at the annual gathering of the Trade Union Congress.

Days after backing tax rises for the rich, the Most Rev Justin Welby said that he would ignore pleas to "stay out of politics". He said that there was "something wrong with the tax system" if it allowed online giants such as Amazon to "leech off the taxpayer". He also made an impassioned plea for a "new unionisation" of Britain, noting that Christian socialists had played a key role in the founding of unions and the Labour Party.

Archbishop Welby added that ministers should scrap the universal credit policy, insisting: "If they can't get it right, they need to stop rolling it out." He further challenged the government to put food banks and night shelters out of business by removing the need for their services.

The speech prompted criticism from Conservatives including Ben Bradley MP who tweeted "Not clear to me when or how it can possibly be appropriate for the Archbishop of Canterbury to be appearing at TUC conference or parroting Labour policy." His comments echoed those of the former Conservative MP, Sir Gerald Howarth who said last year "...the Church of England always seems to have all the solutions to



political problems, but it never seems to be able to solve its own difficulties."

Speaking to *Churches Update*, John McDonnell said "...the Archbishop of Canterbury is simply fulfilling his responsibility as a religious leader, which is to tell it like it is. He is not taking any party political sides. I welcome his impassioned plea for reform and hope his views and ideas will be addressed by all political parties."

"He has set out a bold vision for a different society, one without the evils of the gig economy, the exploitation of workers and tax dodging of the multinationals. I welcome his speech, and the growing movement against the failures of austerity."

Archbishop Welby was the first serving archbishop to have addressed the Trade Unions Congress since Lord Carey in 1997.

TORIES "WEAK" ON BETTING REFORMS

Labour MPs call on Ministers to show bravery in fight against Fixed Odds Betting Terminals

Labour has accused the government of being *"fundamentally weak"* after Ministers bowed to pressure from bookmakers and agreed to a two-year delay before slashing the maximum stake on controversial fixed-odds betting terminals (FOBTs).

The maximum stake on the machines will still be cut from £100 to £2 but the change will not take effect until 2020, under the terms of a deal with the Treasury.

Gamblers will lose an extra £4bn in the intervening period, based on the average £1.8bn a year in revenues taken by the machines, which critics say are highly addictive and allow huge losses to rack up quickly.

Labour's deputy leader Tom Watson said: *"Capitulating to a two-year delay is a pathetic move from a fundamentally weak government. Those who praised the government when the announcement was made will feel badly let down."*

"They are already rolling back on their promises



and allowing these machines to ruin more lives."

Fellow Labour MP Carolyn Harris (above), a long-time campaigner against FOBTs, said she was *"breathing fire"* about the reported delay.

Sources in the FOBT manufacturing industry have previously confided that it should take only six to eight weeks to alter software to implement a new maximum stake.

A Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport spokesperson declined to comment on the reported delay, referring questions to the Treasury.

REFORM OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

A report, authored by former Labour MP, Charles Clarke, has called for urgent reform of religion in schools in England and Wales.

The paper, *'A New Settlement Revised: Religion and Belief in Schools'* notes that the laws governing religion in schools have not been updated since 1944 and calls on the government to create a national syllabus for Religious Education.

Speaking at the launch of the report, Charles, who is now Visiting Professor in Politics and Faith at Lancaster University, said: *"The current legal relationship between religion, belief and schools is outdated ...what's needed, and what we call for in this pamphlet, is an urgent reform of the law that underpins the way religion is handled in schools."*

The full report can be read **here**.

MP ISSUES WARNING ON HIGH-COST CREDIT

Government urged to step in and help Wonga customers following administration

Labour MP, Stella Creasy has urged the government to protect customers of the collapsed payday lender, Wonga.

The collapse of Wonga has left an estimated 200,000 customers still owing more than £400m in short-term loans. Borrowers were told to continue making payments and administrators are expected to sell Wonga's loan book to another lending firm.

Stella has also warned that new lenders are exploiting the gap in the market left by the decline of Wonga. Writing in the Guardian, she said: *"Whether we consider the move of high-cost credit companies like Provident into providing credit cards under the Vanquis brand, or the*



development of Amigo loans, which use guarantors to underwrite loans and so evade requirements about respect for debt repayment plans, consumers continue to be exploited by these forms of lending."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Diane Abbott, Labour's Shadow Home Secretary, has slammed the government after it emerged civil servants were planning to pay immigration detainees £1 per hour to do menial jobs.

The information has emerged as part of a legal challenge against the Home Office brought by detainees protesting about being paid what they called a "slave labour".

Speaking to Churches Update, Diane said: *"This is an absolute scandal...this shameful policy fits entirely with this government's treatment of immigration detainees as something less than ordinary human beings deserving dignity and respect."*

Labour's Shadow Minister for Disabled People, Marsha de Cordova, has criticised official statistics showing that almost two thirds of decisions made at Work Capability Assessments are incorrect.

Commenting on the figures published by the DWP, Marsha said: *"The number of decisions being overturned at appeal reveals the shocking human impact of callous and inaccurate assessments."*

"The Government is forcing thousands of disabled people through lengthy appeals and mandatory reconsideration processes to access their right to social security," she added.

CONFERENCE DIARY 2018

Sunday 23 September

9 a.m: Labour Conference Church Service

St James in the City, Upper Parliament Street
Liverpool, L8 1UR. In partnership with
Redeeming our Communities.

10 a.m: Love Your CLP Reception (with Louise Davies and Jonathan Reynolds MP)

St James in the City, Upper Parliament Street
Liverpool, L8 1UR.

6 p.m: Catholic Mass followed by reception

Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral, Mount
Pleasant, L3 5TQ. In partnership with
Catholics for Labour.

Monday 24 September

8 a.m: Christian on the Left prayer breakfast: social justice through prayer and action (with Marsha de Cordova MP and Stephen Timms MP)

St Brides Church, Liverpool, L8 7LT. In
partnership The Trussell Trust.

4 p.m: Labour Party faiths reception (with Stephen Timms MP)

The Collection Lounge, ACC. In partnership
with Islamic Relief.

6 p.m: Storing up trouble? Is the government pulling the plug on offender housing? (with Kate Green MP and Yasmin Qureshi MP)

St Brides Church, Liverpool, L8 7LT. In
partnership with Langley House Trust.

Tuesday 25 September

8 a.m: Christian on the Left prayer breakfast: praying for the end of violence against children in emergencies

Quaker Meeting House, Liverpool, L1 3PT. In
partnership with World Vision.

12.30 p.m: Is the UK a place of refuge or a hostile environment? (with David Lammy MP, Kate Green MP and Stephen Doughty MP) Quaker Meeting House, Liverpool, L1 3PT. In partnership with Sat 7.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

More than ever, the Labour Party is committed to listening to and learning from those of religious faith—including those in the churches. We realise that many will not commit to supporting any particular political party, and we respect that. But we are interested to hear what you have to say. There are a few things you can do to help us in this work:

- 1. Tell your friends about this newsletter.** We want to be in dialogue with as many people of faith as possible. Encourage others to join our mailing list at www.labour.org.uk/faith.
- 2. Tell us how we can help you.** Write to Stephen Timms MP (Faith Envoy), c/o The Labour Party, Southside, 105 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QT; or email stephen@stephentimms.org.uk.
- 3. Ask to display this newsletter in your church.** Ask your church leader if they are willing for this newsletter to be displayed so others can read about what Labour is doing.